

Sheldon Building
9-15 First Street
San Francisco
San Francisco County
California

HABS No. CA-2203

HABS
CAL.
38-SANFRA,
165-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

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165-

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
SHELDON BUILDING

Historic Name: Sheldon Building

Location: 9-15 First Street
Assessor's Block 3709, Lot 12, San Francisco
UTM Reference: 10 553020 4182600

Present Owner: Centraland, Inc.

Present Occupant: Ground Floor--World Savings and Loan Association
Upper Floors--various small tenants

Present Use: Ground Floor--savings and loan branch office
Upper Floors--offices, educational facilities
Currently slated for demolition in early 1983.

Statement of
Significance:

The Sheldon Building was built within a year after the 1906 earthquake and is an early example of a major downtown structure utilizing reinforced concrete as a building material. The architect of the building, Benjamin G. McDougall, was an important designer in the San Francisco Bay Area with the first Standard Oil building on Bush Street in San Francisco to his credit. Of equal if not greater importance was the building's engineer, John B. Leonard. Leonard was a leader in the use of reinforced concrete in California. The Sheldon Building is well proportioned and stands as a fine example of a turn-of-the-century office building.

The building is rated "B" in Splendid Survivors, the comprehensive historic resources survey of downtown San Francisco. A "B" rating indicates eligibility for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Although not evaluated as part of the San Francisco City Planning Department's 1974-76 Architectural Inventory, the

Sheldon Building is included on the city's list of "Architecturally and/or Historically Significant Buildings in the C-3 Zoning Districts" endorsed by the City Planning Commission on May 29, 1980.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Physical History

Date of Erection: 1907

Architect: Benjamin G. McDougall

Original Owner: Mark Sheldon Co.

Subsequent Owners: The Sheldon Building has experienced a number of property transactions over the years. In the main, however, ownership of the property has been concentrated in relatively few hands: the Sheldon Office Building Company, Sheldon Associates, and Sheldon Management Company retained ownership in different combinations until 1969 when the latter company sold the property to Milton Meyer. In the next ten years (1969-1979) property ownership changed back and forth among three principal owners--Fremont Properties, Walter H. and Phyllis J. Shorenstein, and Transamerica Title Insurance Company. In 1979 two transactions took place: Transamerica Title Insurance Company sold the property to Calishun, Inc. (1-11-79) and a few days later on 1-17-79 Calishun sold it to the present owners, Centraland, Inc.

Builder/Contractor: John B. Leonard, Engineer
Lindgren-Hicks Company, Builders

Original Plans and Construction: A microfilm set of building permit drawings exists for the building including floor plans, construction details,

elevations, and exterior and interior details. The full set, in microfilm and in 24 x 36 size reproductions, resides with International Land, Inc. (111 Pine Street, San Francisco, California). A selected number have been reproduced for archival purposes and are a part of this record.

**Alterations and
Additions:**

The Sheldon Building has been remodeled over its 25-year history. The majority of alterations been made to the interior office floors and to the ground floor retail spaces to accommodate changing tenants with different needs for space. A major change to the exterior took place in 1958 when the metal cornice at the roof line was removed. Presumably, the decorative cartouches in the attic story were also removed at this time although no such mention is made of it in the building permit records.

In 1964 and again in 1974 major changes occurred to the storefronts on Market and First Streets. In both years, existing storefronts were removed completely and replaced. In 1974, this was done with new aluminum and glass and, in addition, the building lobby was remodeled and extended through the building to a new adjoining plaza created by the demolition of the adjacent building. Although the building permit records are not clear, it is presumed that windows were installed in the now exposed east facade at this time.

Historical Context

The present Sheldon Building is the second building to occupy the site replacing an earlier structure destroyed by the 1906 earthquake and fire. Prior to the earthquakes, the site and vicinity were fully developed with a mixture of uses including industrial, commercial, and residential. The site itself was gen-

erally under water before 1849 and was barely "on shore" by 1852 according to base maps showing the shoreline configurations for these two periods of time.

The post-earthquake/fire period in San Francisco represented a time of rapid rebuilding and the increased use of more modern construction materials and methods such as reinforced concrete. Only two buildings built of reinforced concrete existed prior to 1906; 78 were built immediately after the earthquake/fire. The Sheldon Building was among the first of the major reinforced concrete buildings built in the area destroyed by the disaster. Rebuilding in the vicinity occurred into the early 1920s. Most of these buildings remained until the 1970s when high-rise office structures began to replace them. The Sheldon Building is one of the last "post-1906" structures left on this portion of Market Street.

Both the architect, Benjamin G. McDougall, and the engineer, John B. Leonard, must be credited for using reinforced concrete so soon after the earthquake/fire. Benjamin G. McDougall (1866-1937) began his architectural career as a draftsman in his father's architectural firm of McDougall and Son. He became an architect in 1892 and began his own firm two years later. In 1897, he went into partnership with his brothers Charles C. and George B. McDougall. (The latter brother went on to become the State Architect for California, a position he held at the time of Benjamin McDougall's death in 1937). Benjamin G. McDougall's practice included a number of buildings in Fresno, California, in addition to his designs for structures in the San Francisco Bay Area. A list of his work includes the Standard Oil Building at 200 Bush Street, the Central YMCA at 220 Golden Gate Avenue, and apartments at 800 and 901 Bush Street, all in San Francisco; in Oakland, the Federal Realty Building at Telegraph and Broadway and St. Paul's Church; in Berkeley, the Berkeley YMCA, St. Luke's Church, and the Shattuck Hotel.

John B. Leonard (1864-1945) was a native of Union City, Michigan. His education in civil engineering was at Michigan State, the University of Illinois, and the University of Michigan. He came to California in 1888, during the "Boom of the '80s." After a year in Los Angeles, he came north to San Francisco in 1889. Employed as a draftsman and civil engineer by several firms through the

years, he opened his own office as a consulting civil engineer in 1904. Though his education had been in steel engineering, by 1905 he began to promote himself as specializing in reinforced concrete. For the next quarter century, Leonard was certainly among the leaders in the development of reinforced concrete technology in California, and may have been the material's leading proponent. Apart from his engineering work, he was an Associate Editor for Architect and Engineer, and used his position to promote reinforced concrete engineering. He was instrumental in securing changes in San Francisco's building codes to allow use of the material. He lectured up and down the West Coast, and in New York. He was frequently sought as an inspector in building failures. He worked to establish closer relations between architects and engineers, and to ensure quality control in reinforced concrete construction. From 1928 to 1934 he served as Superintendent of Building Inspection in San Francisco, returning to private practice until his death in 1945. His legacy includes 46 bridges throughout California (many of which are still in use and one of which--Fernbridge in Humboldt County--has been designated a National Historic Civil Engineering Landmark), as well as buildings in the Bay Area and in Los Angeles.¹

Mark Sheldon (1829-1902) was a San Francisco businessman who like many others made his money initially in gold and silver and later invested in the city's real estate. Sheldon first arrived in San Francisco in 1851 and stayed on to work in Marysville, California, both as an employee of a mining company and as the proprietor of his own mining supply store. His return to San Francisco (exact date unknown) saw him engaged in minor commercial ventures including importing goods from the East Coast. In 1861 he and several partners (including H. G. Blaisdell, later governor of Nevada) built an ore mill in Seven Mile Canyon just below Virginia City, Nevada. The success of the mill led to other mining-related investments, the last of which was the Empire Mill and Mining Company.

¹John Snyder, Unpublished paper on John B. Leonard, 1982.

Sheldon's real estate activity in San Francisco began with the purchase of the southeast corner of Kearny and Commercial Streets. He subsequently owned property on Washington Street and purchased the southeast corner of Market and First Streets upon which, in 1886, he built the first Sheldon Building.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

General Statement

The Sheldon Building is an eight-story office building with a basement and two interior light wells. As described by the architect in Architect and Engineer of California (November 1906, p. 49): "It is to be of reinforced concrete faced with buff terra cotta [only the entranceway was treated in this way, the rest of the building was finished in cement], and will be 137.6 feet deep with a frontage on Market Street of 91 feet 8 inches. The exterior is treated in a style that has been evolved for office buildings in this country--and which lends itself well to a structure that must have abundance of light. The ornament has been concentrated at the first story and at the cornice. The effect of repetition is broken by a slight offset of the two bays at either end of the facade, these breaks being emphasized by the addition of cartouches immediately below the capitals of the three end pilasters [a subsequent design change put the cartouches in the attic story above the capitals]. The ornamental treatment in the first story is confined to the entrances to the offices which occupy the six [later changed to seven] upper floors of the building. The main entrance which will be on First Street is given a simple Doric treatment, with banded columns supporting an entablature that ties in and lines up with the heavy belt course which marks the top of the first story. The Market Street side, while a little smaller, is treated in the same general style, having pilasters instead of columns--the entablature being the same as for the main entrance" (also subsequently changed--Market Street had columns and although still considered to be the secondary entrance had a much more substantial appearance than the First Street entrance).

Both facades are divided into nine vertical shafts and three horizontal divisions consisting of a ground floor, a six-story shaft, and a one-story attic level.

The Market Street (north) facade is balanced, consisting of two end bays containing two vertical shafts, flanking five shafts of regular vertical strips of windows. The First Street facade also consists of two bays flanking five shafts of, in this case, irregular vertical strips of windows.

The Doric treatment of the entranceways and all of the ground floor including the belt course above it has been removed. The attic level has, in similar fashion, been modernized through the removal of the cornice and decorative cartouches. The capitals of the pilasters still remain showing the egg-and-dart treatment of the echinus.

The integrity of the Sheldon Building has been compromised although its basic form remains intact. The building had little in the way of decorative elements and gains its strength from the overall composition of its major elements.

Description of Exterior

1. Foundation: Reinforced concrete
2. Walls: Reinforced concrete with cement finish. Terra cotta was used in the entranceways
3. Structural Systems: Reinforced concrete with reinforced concrete walls and floors
4. Porches, Stoops, Balconies, Bulkheads: Not applicable
5. Chimneys: Not applicable
6. Openings: All windows are double hung, one over one, and are found in four different compositions: singly, in equal pairs, three together--either all equal or with two smaller flanking a larger, and four together--all of equal dimension. Two light courts extend from the second floor to the top of the building; skylights on the second floor allow light to penetrate to the ground level retail stores.
7. Roof: A flat, composition roof. A small penthouse covers the elevator shaft.

Description of Interior

1. Floor Plans: The ground floor was originally planned for five stores, four facing Market Street and one taking its entry off of First Street. The main corridor came back from First Street to the elevators and main stairway. It was joined at this point by the "entrance corridor" extending perpendicularly from Market Street. The main corridor was remodeled and extended through to the other side of the building in 1974. The demise of the entrance corridor is unknown although an educated conclusion might be that it was removed in 1964 when the ground floor was remodeled for a savings and loan office. It remains in that configuration today.

The typical upper floor plan consisted of 27 offices all having exterior light from either the street facade or from a light court. The original floor plan remains basically intact with varying degrees of modifications over the years.

2. Stairways: The main stairway in the main corridor/lobby consisted of Verde Antique marble walls, White Cloud marble base, treads, and risers with metal balustrade and mahogany rail. This has been remodeled so that only the marble tread and risers remain. The upper floors still have the original treatment although the walls were finished in plaster and not in marble. Several other minor stairways are located in various parts of the building.

3. Flooring: The original flooring was marble. Most floors are now covered with asphalt tile or are carpeted.

4. Wall and Ceiling Finish: Verde Antique marble was used in the lobby area; subsequently remodeled. Original plans show special treatment for offices on the eighth floor (see drawing 106-16) but none of this treatment remains. Typical office partitions were plaster with wood doors with either a Florentine glass panel or wood panel, and a glass transom of similar material. Ceilings were plaster, although now many are covered with acoustical tile.

5. Hardware: All hardware has been replaced, although the bronze mail chute is intact.

Site and Surroundings

The Sheldon Building occupies the southeast corner of Market and First Streets. It now sits among numerous new high-rise office buildings and is the last "post-1906" building fronting on Market Street for several blocks.

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

Current plans call for demolition of the Sheldon Building in early 1983. This historical documentation was prepared by Hisashi B. Sugaya of Sugaya and Frej and Jane Lidz, Photographer, in November 1982 and includes a historical report, photodocumentation, and documentation of reproductions of the drawings filed for the original building permit.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The Architect and Engineer. Volume 130, No. 2, August 1937. The Foundation for San Francisco's Architectural Heritage. Building and Architect files.

Leonard, John B. "The Use of Reinforced Concrete in San Francisco and Vicinity." Architect and Engineer. Volume 25, No. 2, March 1911.

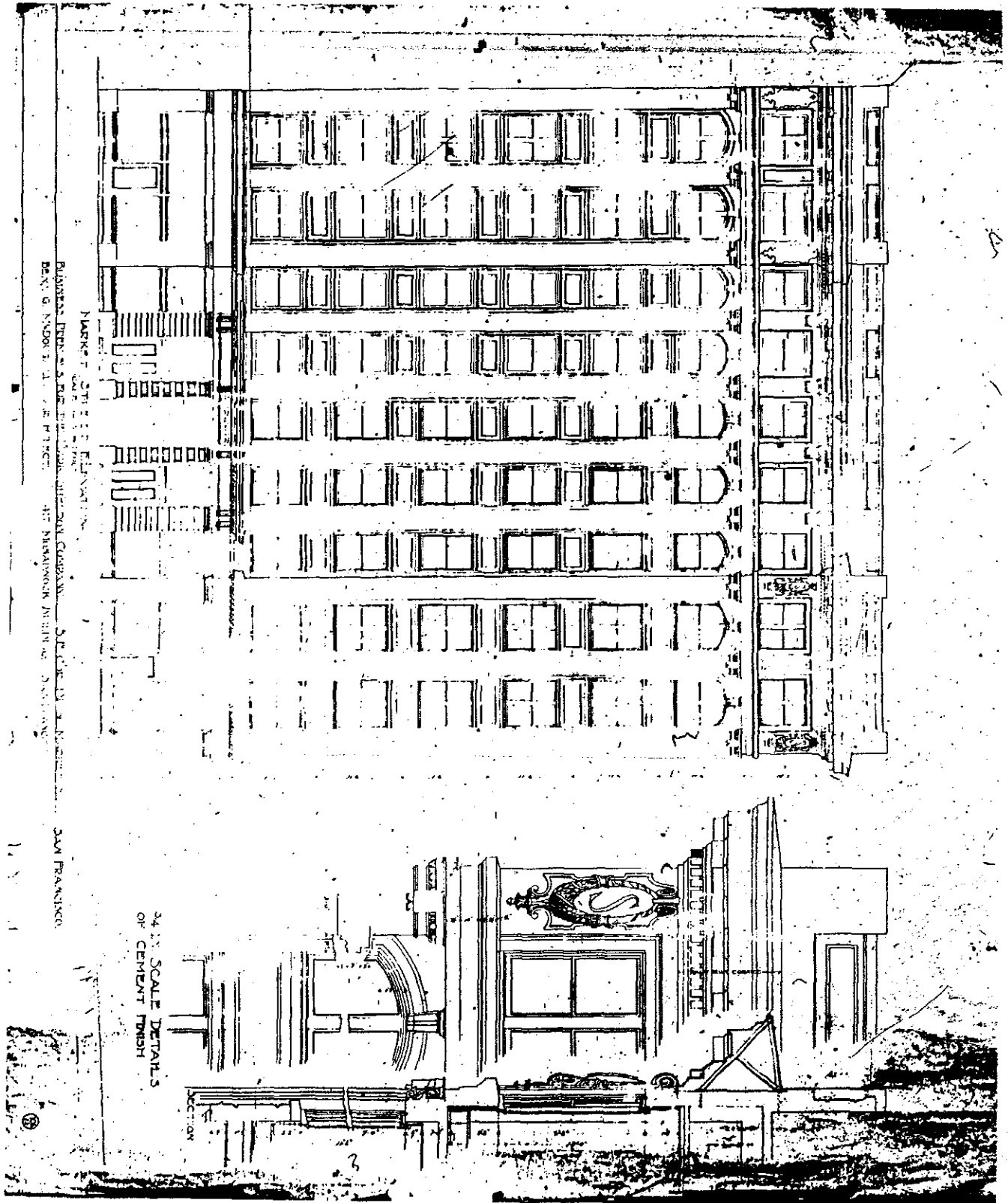
McDougall, Benjamin G. "Seven-Story Reinforced Concrete Office Building." Architect and Engineer. November 1906.

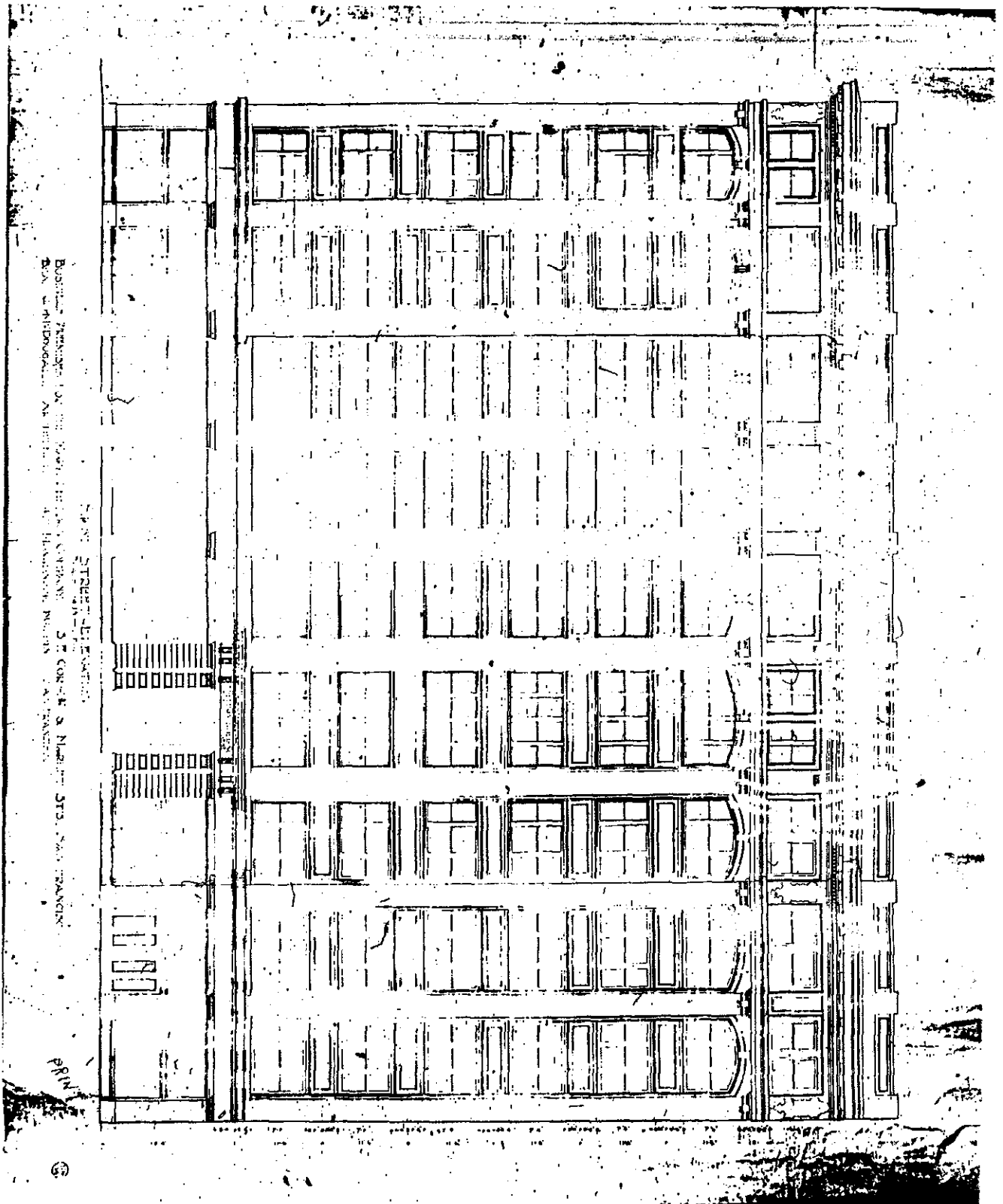
San Francisco City Planning Commission. Central Plaza Project Environmental Impact Report. 1982.

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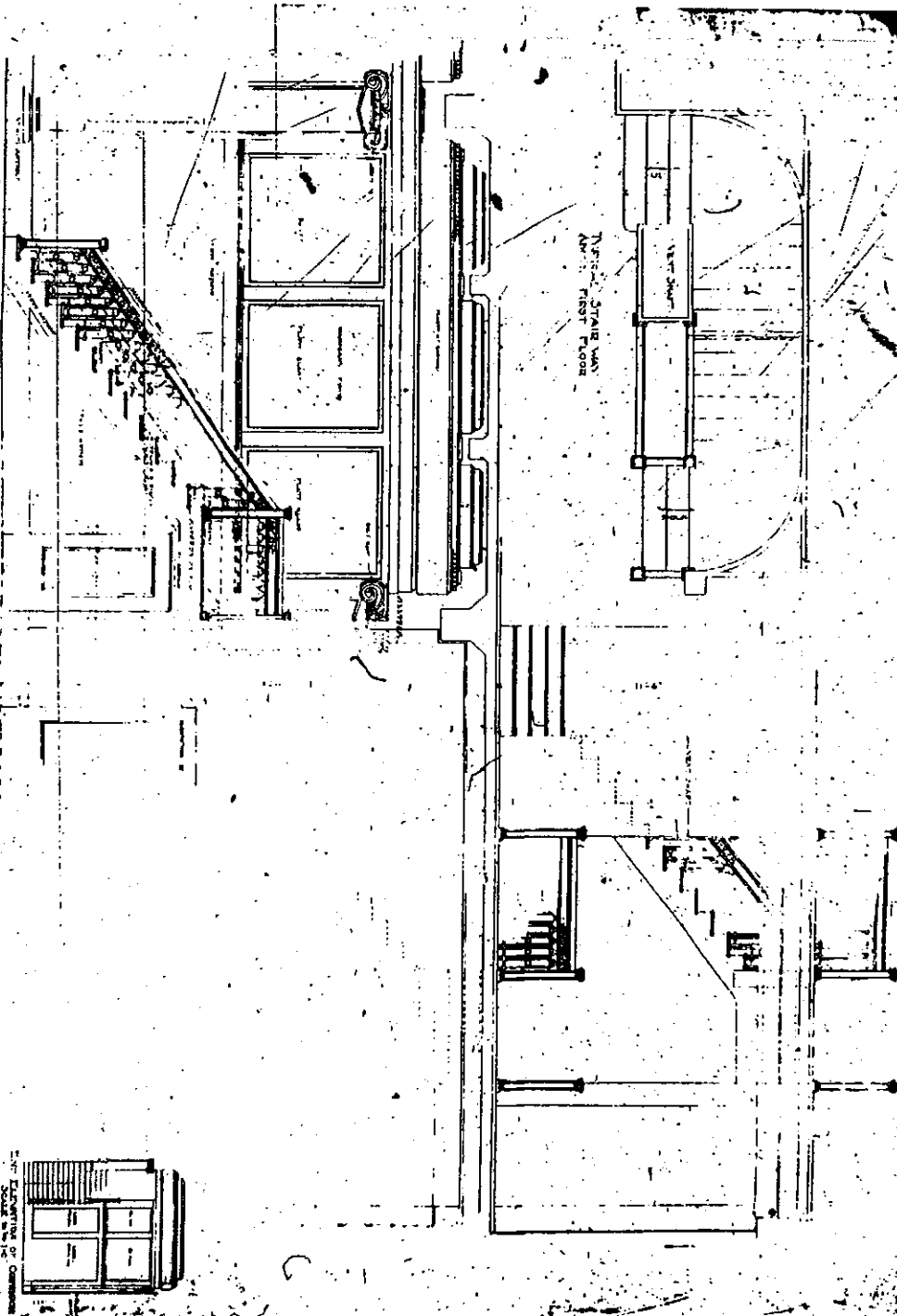
Snyder, John. Unpublished paper on John B. Leonard. 1982.

Originals for the following reduced copies of drawings can be found in the Library of Congress.





BUILDING DRAWING FOR THE SHIELD BUILDING, 37 COR. E. & N. 1ST STS., SAN FRANCISCO
BY W. H. HARRISON, ARCHT. 1911. AT HARRISON, MILLER & COMPANY, ARCHT.



BUSINESS PREMISES FOR THE BLACK SITCH & COMPANY, 417 E. CALIFORNIA ST., SAN FRANCISCO
DRAWN BY: M. J. MCDONALD, ARCHITECT

1/4" IN SCALE DETAIL OF FIRST STAIR

